

ACTION – 5

Report and Recommendations from the Interagency Committee Regarding Barriers in Public Transportation Services for People with Disabilities

ISSUE:

At the May 23, 2005, meeting of the Board, the Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) was directed to chair an interagency workgroup to plan and implement a process to identify transportation barriers faced by people with disabilities (Attachment I). This Board directive was in response to issues raised by residents with disabilities reporting inadequate access to, and reliability of, transportation options. The results from the three public forums that were held to solicit input from seniors and people with disabilities are provided in Attachments II - IV.

RECOMMENDATION:

The County Executive recommends the following:

1. Direct appropriate staff to identify seniors and people with disabilities to participate in on-going sensitivity training classes for FAIRFAX CONNECTOR and FASTRAN operators and staff. The implementing agencies responsible for this action are FCDOT and the Fairfax County Department of Community and Recreation Services (DCRS).
2. Implement a “mystery rider” program in which a staff member rides the service anonymously to monitor FAIRFAX CONNECTOR, FASTRAN, Seniors-on-the-Go (SOTG), and taxicab street operations, with particular focus on the travel needs of seniors and people with disabilities.
3. Formally transmit a copy of the public forum comments to all service providers that offer transportation services to seniors and people with disabilities that receive funding from Fairfax County. In addition, this correspondence should emphasize the need for on-going sensitivity training for all operators and staff involved with providing services to seniors and people with disabilities. Require sensitivity training where Fairfax County operates the service directly.
4. Research the potential use of “smart card” technology for the SOTG program.
5. Implement a subsidized taxicab program for people with disabilities similar to the existing SOTG subsidy program. Specifically, registered clients of MetroAccess

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who also reside in Fairfax County would be able to purchase eight books of subsidized (\$30 value at a cost of \$10) taxicab tickets per year. This program would complement MetroAccess service for Fairfax County registered users and provide an additional mobility option. Currently, many jurisdictions in the Washington metropolitan region (Alexandria City, Arlington County, Fairfax City, Falls Church City, Anne Arundel County, Baltimore County, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, and the District of Columbia) have a taxicab program in place that offers a ridership subsidy for those with disabilities.

6. Explore the development of a One-Stop-Shop pilot program for providing customer information about all transportation services. Currently, customers are frustrated and challenged by navigating the myriad of available transportation options (Metrorail, Metrobus, MetroAccess, FAIRFAX CONNECTOR, FASTRAN, Taxicabs, SOTG, Senior Express, and Medicaid transportation), all with varying eligibility requirements, and differing charge structures, and finally, uncertainty over the question of linkages between services. A One-Stop-Shop for all information about Fairfax County funded transportation programs would be a significant improvement over the current multi-furcated approach where each service provider has a separate telephone number and information dissemination process.
7. Develop a comprehensive, ten-year action plan that prioritizes and defines the multi-modal, multi-jurisdictional transportation recommendations (see Attachments II, III, and IV). The plan will consider and prioritize, with public input, the recommendations documented in the public meeting process, and develop draft policies which address the intent of the comments. The Plan, once completed, will be presented to the Board of Supervisors.

TIMING:

Action, at this time, on approving the above-recommended items is requested to address the removal of barriers to public transportation opportunities for people with disabilities.

BACKGROUND:

FCDOT, with assistance from the County's Disability Services Planning and Development Program (Department of Family Services), Area Agency on Aging, Community Services Board, Department of Cable Communication and Consumer Protection, Systems Management for Human Services, and FASTRAN, conducted three community forums. The public forums were held on Tuesday, November 1, 2005, from 7 to 9 p.m., at the South County Government Center; Thursday, November 3, 2005,

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from noon to 2 p.m., in the Reston Human Services Conference Room; and Saturday, November 5, 2005, at the Virginia Tech/University of Virginia Northern Virginia campus in Falls Church. These sites were selected because of their proximity to public transportation, and because they were geographically dispersed. Day, evening, and weekend sessions were scheduled to allow for maximum participation. Each forum had a transcriber and alternative accommodations were available upon request.

The forums were advertised through a public notice on FAIRFAX CONNECTOR and FASTRAN buses, in Fairfax County libraries, through e-mails, in NewsLink, and on several list-serves including those of the Arc of Northern VA, the Endependence Center, and the Disabilities Services Board. Additionally, notification was provided through e-mails, posters at senior centers and therapeutic recreation locations, and letters mailed to Fairfax County residents who are registered users of MetroAccess. The Disability Services Board had previously found that half of the people with disabilities are seniors; therefore, the forums also were advertised in the Area Agency on Aging's "Golden Gazette," which is a monthly newsletter.

Speakers included customers of public transit, individuals representing County appointed boards and commissions, government staff, care providers, and family members of riders. More than 85 people attended the forums, not including staff, and 51 citizens submitted written comments.

Many specific complaints (320) were received (a citizen could comment on more than one issue) as well as recommendations (129) and a number of compliments (17). Speakers talked about using transportation for trips to medical appointments, work, community programs, education, and for social activities. Most emphasized the importance of timely, reliable, and accessible transportation. (A complete list of public comments is a part of this report and can be found in Attachment II – Complaints, Attachment III – Recommendations and Compliments, and Attachment IV – Executive Summary of Comments.)

The recommendations, contained in this Board Action Item, were developed by the interagency committee after a comprehensive planning review process that incorporated the full scope of all public comments and recommendations. The committee identified some common themes, such as operator/staff behavior, communication, and planning, which emerged during the public outreach and crafted recommendations that addressed these themes.

FISCAL IMPACT:

All of the proposed recommendations, with the exception of the implementation of the One-Stop-Shop, the taxicab subsidy program for the disabled, and the 10-year action

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plan – recommendations 5, 6, and 7 - are relatively easily addressed using existing staff resources.

The cost for the implementation of a taxicab-subsidy program (#5) is estimated, on an on-going basis, at approximately \$283,240 annually. Funding for a portion of this program - \$150,000 – can be absorbed within the FY 2007 SOTG program. Funds for the remaining \$133,240 are anticipated to be available from savings in the FY 2006 Department of Transportation budget. The Department will request that these funds be carried over to FY 2007 as a part of the *FY 2006 Carryover Review*.

The interagency committee estimates the cost for a consultant to coordinate the One-Stop-Shop (#6) to be approximately \$100,000. Funding for this recommendation is anticipated as a one-time cost with any on-going costs identified through the consultant process. Funds to support the initial one-time consultant cost are anticipated to be available from savings in the FY 2006 Department of Transportation budget. The Department will request that these funds be carried over to FY 2007 as part of the *FY 2006 Carryover Review*.

Finally, the cost of developing a 10-year action plan (#7) is a one-time cost, estimated at \$250,000. Funds to support the one-time costs of this initiative are anticipated to be available from savings in the FY 2006 Department of Transportation budget. The Department will request that these funds be carried over to FY 2007 as part of the *FY 2006 Carryover Review*.

In summary, implementation of all recommendations is estimated to cost \$633,240. No additional General Fund support is being requested at this time; however, an amount of \$133,240, reflecting the on-going portion of the taxicab program for the disabled not able to be absorbed within the FY 2007 SOTG program, will be requested as a part of the FY 2008 budget process.

ENCLOSED DOCUMENTS:

Attachment I - May 23, 2005, Board Matter

Attachment II - Summary of Complaints

Attachment III - Summary of Public Recommendations and Compliments

Attachment IV - Executive Summary of All Comments

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